

SPOTLIGHT PACIFIC



Regional Security and The Responsibility to Protect Seminar in Fiji

On the occasion of the 51st Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting, the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P Centre), in partnership with the Fiji Law Society (FLS) and the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), held a seminar titled Regional Security and the Responsibility to Protect, in Suva, Fiji. The seminar was held on 11-12 July 2022, and aimed to explore the linkages between atrocity prevention and the thematic pillars of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) 2050 Strategy.

The Centre's R2P Pacific Project focuses on building partnerships to advance the R2P agenda and socialising the concept of atrocity prevention among key stakeholders, including civil society organisations, regional and government agencies, and those working in related fields such as human rights. Working in partnership with FLS meant that entry points could be identified for lawyers to advocate and use their skills and knowledge in raising awareness of the early warning signs of atrocity crime.

The 2050 Strategy maps the course of actions PIFS will take in addressing crucial issues for the region. It outlines what Pacific Island nations seek



Figure 2: 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (Source: PIFS presentation)

to achieve collectively, and provides an opportunity to engage and shape the region's most significant dynamics and influences to secure its long-term well-being and prosperity.

The General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Reverend James Bhagwan, officially opened the seminar by highlighting the need for human and environmental security policy that protects the lives of Pacific peoples. He called special attention to the importance of preventing atrocity crimes, noting that Fiji and other Pacific islands have had their share of atrocities "as a result of socio-economic and political crisis". Rev Bhagwan said the church has learnt the lessons of its previous involvement in political unrest and that the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma would not play a role in any future coup. His comments, as well as other aspects of the event, were reported in local media.¹

Executive Director of FCOSS, Ms Vani Catanasiga, emphasised the need to highlight R2P in light of the current regional security context and its links with human rights, climate change, and gender-based violence. She said that in convening the workshop, FCOSS aimed to bring civil society and regional bodies together to contextualise R2P within key frameworks, especially the 2050 Strategy. Ms Catanasiga further held a session on constructing a collaborative and community-centred early warning mechanism for atrocity prevention in Fiji, which was identified as a priority during the civil society workshop on R2P held in November 2021.

Pacific R2P Director Romulo Nayacalevu echoed the need to shape Pacific narratives and participate in framing Pacific legal architecture to include atrocity prevention. He highlighted the links between R2P and the thematic issues in the 2050 Strategy and noted regional opportunities for accountability for human rights under existing frameworks, including the Boe and Biketawa Declarations, the Gender Equality Declaration and the Kainaki Declaration (inter alia).

Deputy Director of the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Mr Josaia Osbourne, moderated the following discourse on the 2050 Strategy, aligning it to the Istanbul and Busan principles. He emphasised the role of non-government partners and actors in the Strategy. As the Secretariat to NGO

liaison units in the Pacific, PIANGO leads in advocating essential issues in the region, raising awareness on climate and social justice and highlighting human rights violations, including in West Papua.

Mr Joel Nilson, the Pacific Regional Adviser and Mr Penioni Naupoto, the Engagement Adviser shared PIFS' contribution to ensuring the participation of key stakeholders in framing the 2050 Strategy and what to expect after its endorsement by Pacific leaders. Ms Rebecca Barber (University of Queensland) presented on the key principles of R2P as well as early warning and risk assessment, and explained UN mechanisms, international law, and accountability systems.

President of the Fiji Law Society, Mr William "Wylie" Clarke, displayed the importance of situating R2P in the local context and the vital role that lawyers and civil society play in ensuring that protection and safeguards are in place.

The regional CSO Dialogue

On 11 July, the APR2P Centre was invited to participate, alongside FCOSS, in a dialogue for CSO representatives to share priorities with Pacific leaders, which was led and facilitated by PIANGO. This dialogue is an important platform recently created by the Secretariat to ensure that civil society voices are heard on key issues in the region. Previously important issues in the Pacific were determined solely by member States and filtered through the Forum processes. This was an opportunity for the Centre to put forward atrocity prevention as a key issue for the region, while FCOSS, as a lead player in the CSO dialogue, connected the themes of early warning and atrocity prevention with broader work of NGOs and civil society.

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting is an annual meeting of heads of government across the 18 PIF Member States on key regional issues. The 2022 PIF Communique highlights security and climate change as key priorities. By continuing to socialise the R2P agenda in the Pacific alongside partners like FCOSS, the Centre aims for it to become integrated in regional discussions and platforms on human rights and security, and more broadly, policy development across the region.



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1. <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Methodist-Church-in-Fiji-will-play-no-part-in-any-coup-going-forward--Rev-Bhagwan-x8rf45/>